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ABSTRACT

A description is presented of forty classroom-tested activities for motivating students to practice listening comprehension and speaking skills in any foreign language. Some of the activities include practical suggestions and follow-up activities. All the activities are preceded by a statement of purpose, categorized by proficiency levels (beginning, intermediate, and advanced), and grouped under three subheadings: (1) tete-a-tete conversations, (2) small group interactions, and (3) whole class activities. The table of contents is arranged to provide a cross reference to each communication activity. A list of sources is included. (Author/AMH)

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LISTENING AND SPEAKING ACTIVITIES FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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INTRODUCTION

During the audiolingual era of language education, many teachers emphasized learning about a foreign language's linguistic forms and features rather than learning to communicate successfully in the language. These teachers required students to manipulate pattern drills based on model sentences, they expected students to memorize dialog lines and grammar rules, and they corrected all students' errors immediately. As a result, students seldom used the structures and words that they learned in order to express their ideas, feelings, and beliefs. When faced with the task of conversing with native speakers in the foreign language, many of these students were embarrassed at their inability to communicate--even after two or more years of formal instruction in the language.

Most high school and college students today enroll in foreign language courses primarily because they want or need to converse about topics that interest them. Teachers need, therefore, instructional materials that encourage and stimulate students to communicate spontaneously in a foreign language rather than to manipulate it unnaturally. Unfortunately, there is still a dearth of such materials that are available commercially. Beginning and intermediate language textbooks continue to include too many mechanical exercises and complex grammatical explanations. The time lag between the development

and the publication of good communication materials has caused some teachers to write their own activities. Too often, however, teachers lack sufficient experience in developing such materials, or they simply do not have the time to do so.

This paper was written in response to these immediate instructional problems and needs. It presents a detailed description of forty classroom-tested activities for motivating students to practice listening comprehension and speaking skills in any foreign language. These activities were collected from the sources listed at the end of the paper; occasionally, they include practical suggestions and follow-up activities. Teachers will want to adopt and modify them according to their own teaching style and to their students' communicative needs. All the activities are preceded by a statement of purpose, are catergorized by proficiency levels (beginning, intermediate, and advanced), and are grouped under three subheadings: Tête-à-Tête Conversations, Small Group Interactions, and Whole Class Activities. The Table of Contents provides a useful cross-reference to each communication activity by suggested proficiency level and page number.

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TÊTE-À-TÊTE CONVERSATIONS

INITIAL ENCOUNTER (I, A)

Purpose: To "break the ice" among students at the first class meeting.

Conversation partners receive a list of personalized questions, then interview one another in the foreign language. Afterwards, partners introduce each other to the class with or without the use of notes.

GETTING BETTER ACQUAINTED (I, A)

Purpose: To obtain additional information about another student, particularly about his or her greatest personal achievements.

Conversation partners draw and discuss simple pictures that represent an important personal achievement in their lives for each of the following time periods: Ages 1-6, Ages 7-12, Ages 13-17, etc.

KNOWING THE REAL YOU (I, A)

Purpose: To become even better acquainted with another student.

Directions to the students: List at least five questions that your conversation partner should ask you in order to know the real you. Exchange your list of questions with your partner. Begin the interview, writing down the answers to his or her questions. Then introduce your partner to the class, using the information that you obtained from the interview. Each partner may correct or expand this information.

Follow-up Activities:

1. Discuss obstacles that inhibited communication at any point in students' interviews.
2. Discuss how students felt before and after their interview.
3. Discuss the differences between an interview and any ordinary conversation.

CONVERSATION CARDS (B, I, A)

Purpose: To review vocabulary items or grammatical structures in a personalized way.

Each pair of students receives interview cards that direct them to ask each other personalized questions containing vocabulary items or grammatical structures that were introduced recently in class.

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TELEPHONE TALK (I)

Purpose: To obtain information by telephone.

Give each student a list of information items that he or she must find out about a native speaker who agrees to participate in an interview. The student telephones the native speaker at a prearranged time and tries to obtain the information in the foreign language.

Variation: Ask students to obtain specific information over the telephone from an impersonal source such as from a bus, train, airline company, or some other commerical firm.

Follow-up Activity: Discuss the people with whom students spoke, the information that they exchanged, and the problems that they experienced in communicating by telephone.

ROSE TECHNIQUE (B, I)

Purpose: To describe concrete or abstract objects, using prepositions of location or position.

Conversation partners sit facing each other with a partition between them so that they cannot see one another. The partners receive identical sets of cards that portray concrete or abstract objects. One partner arranges his or her cards in any order, then describes each card and its location to the other person. Both partners converse with each other in the foreign language, asking and answering questions about which cards should be placed where. When all their cards have been arranged to the satisfaction of both partners, they compare the results. Then they switch roles and repeat the activity.

MIRRORED IMAGES (I, A)

Purpose: To practice language of description as well as prepositions of location and position.

Students pair off, equipped with paper and pencil. One partner begins by drawing a picture (his or her own picture or a simple line drawing provided by the teacher). As the partner draws the picture, he or she describes it to the other partner who listens and tries to draw an identical picture. Then both partners compare their drawings and switch roles.

COMBINING ARRANGEMENT (I)

Purpose: To practice language of description in a communicative context.

One conversation partner is given a sheet of paper with 1-20 simple drawings arranged vertically. The other partner is given a similar sheet with a combination of identical and different drawings than those of his or her partner. One set of drawings is numbered 1X, 2, 3X, 4, 5X, etc., and the other set is marked 1, 2X, 3, 4X, 5, etc. As partners sit facing

each other, the student who has the drawing marked 1X goes first, and begins describing the drawing in the foreign language. The two partners must decide together if their drawings match or differ, and mark them accordingly. Then the partner with the picture numbered 2X describes his or her drawing, and the activity continues as explained above. When they finish the activity, the conversation partners tally and compare their results.

INK BLOTS (I, A)

Purpose: To express one's intuitions based on water designs.

Conversation partners scatter several drops of colored water along the center of a creased paper. Then they fold the paper along the crease, causing the colored water to spread over the two halves of the page. The partners open the paper and discuss in the foreign language their reactions to the meaning of their water designs.

GRAPHOLOGY (I, A)

Purpose: To converse about another student's personality based on an analysis of a handwriting sample.

Teach students some of the basic techniques of handwriting analysis. Students copy a short paragraph that the teacher has written on the chalkboard, then sign their name. Conversation partners analyze and discuss each other's handwriting applying the analytic techniques that they learned.

Follow-up Activity: Distribute copies of several passages written in long-hand by different celebrities such as a president or a movie star. Students pair off and discuss in the foreign language the celebrities' personality and identity.

PALM READING (I, A)

Purpose: To converse about another student's personality based on palm reading.

Teach students some of the basic techniques of palm reading. Conversation partners read each other's palms while communicating in the foreign language.

DIRECTED ROLE PLAY (I, A)

Purpose: To role play a problem common to students who travel or live abroad.

Give each conversation partner a card explaining a role play situation that represents a conflict between the students' native and target cultures. The students act out their assigned roles in the foreign language.

JOB INTERVIEWS (I, A)

Purpose: To simulate a real-life job interview.

Teach the names of common professions in the foreign language. Give one conversation partner a card indicating the name of a job and a specific role: "You are offering the job." Give the other partner a card showing the name of the identical job but a different role: "You are applying for the job." Then the conversation partners play their assigned roles.

For intermediate students: Before beginning this activity, teach some key interview questions in the foreign language such as "Where have you worked before?" and "How long did you work at your last job?".

For advanced students: Before students begin this activity, teach them some positive and negative examples of body language and its influence on the outcome of a job interview.

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SMALL GROUP INTERACTIONS

PERSONALIZED COMPLETION (I)

Purpose: To discuss a topic of high interest to students.

Students read a selection or view a film on a topic that greatly interests them. Then they form small groups and complete open-ended statements that deal with the topic from a personal perspective.

PERCEPTION IN A BOX (I, A)

Purpose: To stimulate small group conversation on individual differences of perception, and to foster group cooperation.

The teacher places five or six objects in a box, then covers it. Each small group has 30 seconds to see the contents of the box without speaking to one another and without taking notes. After returning to their seats, students in each group write a detailed description in the foreign language of the objects they saw. Students discuss their descriptions in their small groups; their task is to agree upon a single description for each object. All groups report their descriptions, then the teacher shows the class each object and describes it in the foreign language.

CINQUIN POETRY (B, I, A)

Purpose: To compose a short poem orally based on a highly structured framework.

Before students form small groups of 5 persons and compose a cinquin poem together, explain and illustrate the following procedures:

Line 1: State the subject in one word.
Line 2: Describe the subject in two words.
Line 3: Describe an action about the subject in three words.
Line 4: Express an opinion about the subject in four words.
Line 5: Restate the subject in one (different) word, thinking about what was already said in your group.

Students sit in a circle. One student begins the poem with Line 1, followed by another student who provides Line 2, and so forth, around the circle.

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PROBLEM-SOLVING SITUATIONS (I, A)

Purpose: To discuss real-life problems in a foreign language.

Give an oral or written description of a problem that often faces a visitor in the foreign culture. The task of each small group is to discuss the best solution or solutions to the problem.

Follow-up Activity: Bring all small groups together in order to discuss their solutions to the problem.

SKITS (I, A)

Purpose: To complete a creative task cooperatively within a short time using drama and a foreign language for communication.

Give each small group a paper bag containing a different object for each group member. Students have 20 minutes to create a skit using the objects in the paper bag (including the bag). Each group presents its skit before the class.

Variation: Students create skits centered around various props that they bring from home.

PICTURE STORIES (B, I, A)

Purpose: To practice language of description, and to increase students' vocabulary.

Distribute a copy of an identical picture story to students in each small group. Give students the names and pronunciation of the content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) that students do not know. Students take turns describing aloud each frame in the picture story.

PICTURE GAME (I, A)

Purpose: To demonstrate how varying perceptions of the same event can create communication breakdowns.

1. Divide the class into groups of 5-8 members. Choose three members designated as Mr. A, Ms. B and Mr. C. The three members from each group leave the room. The teacher shows the remaining students a picture. They have 5 minutes in which to decide on a description of the picture.

2. Call in Mr. A and describe the picture to him. Mr. A may not ask questions although he may ask the group to repeat the description once. He may not write down the description or attempt to draw the picture.

3. Call in Ms. B. Mr. A should describe the picture to Ms. B as it was described to him by the group. Ms. B may not ask questions although she may ask Mr. A to repeat his version once. Ms. B may not write down the description or attempt to draw the picture. Mr. A may now join the rest of the group.

4. Call in Mr. C. Ms. B should describe to Mr. C what Mr. A told her that the group told him about the picture. Mr. C may not ask any questions but may ask Ms. B to repeat her description once. Ms. B now rejoins the rest of her group. Mr. C should now go to the chalkboard and draw a picture of what Ms. B told him that Mr. A told her that the group told him about the picture. As Mr. C draws his picture, he should explain the drawing with the original picture.

STRIP STORY (B, I, A)

Purpose: To stimulate creative interaction through critical thinking, to improve students' self-confidence in using a foreign language creatively, and to integrate four language skills in one activity.

Select a story or anecdote containing the same number of lines as the number of students in each small group. Type each line of the story, then make several copies of it. Cut one copy into strips, each contains one sentence. Randomly distribute one strip per student. Allow a maximum of one minute for students to memorize their strip (they must not write anything down or compare their strips at this time). After the strips are memorized, collect them. Instruct the students that they must now reconstruct the sequence of the story or anecdote without writing down anything. The teacher sits down and remains silent. When the group agrees on a story sequence, the teacher asks the students to repeat the story in sequence, each person saying his or her part. (At this point, the teacher can ask the students to dictate their sequences to their group or the teacher can do so.) Finally, the teacher passes out copies of the original story or anecdote so that the students can compare their oral or written versions of it.

CHARTS AND TABLES (I, A)

Purpose: To speak about specific topics with the aid of charts and tables.

Students classify information items on a specific topic into different categories using a chart or table, e.g., names or descriptions of places that students (1) have visited, (2) have not visited, (3) want to visit, and (4) do not want to visit. Then they discuss the items with their group members.

RANKING (B, I, A)

Purpose: To express likes and dislikes about specific topics.

Students are given a list of 10-15 items that correspond to a specific topic that interests them (e.g., foods). Then they rank the items according to how well they like or dislike them. Students form small groups and discuss how and why they ranked the items.

BROKEN SQUARES (I, A)

Purpose: To sensitize students to different aspects of cooperation in solving a group problem, and to sensitize students to some of their behaviors that facilitate or hinder solving the problem.

For small groups of 5 (plus one observer, if desired).

Time: 15 minutes for the exercise, 15 minutes for discussion.

Directions for making a set of squares: A set of squares consists of five envelopes containing pieces of cardboard which have been cut into different patterns and which, when properly arranged, will form five squares of equal size. One set should be provided for each group of five persons. To prepare a set, cut out five cardboard squares of equal size, approximately six-by-six inches. Place the squares in a row and mark them as below, penciling the letters a,b,c, etc., lightly, so that they can be erased later.

The lines should be so drawn that, when cut out, all pieces marked a will be of exactly the same size, all pieces marked b of the same size, etc. By using multiples of three inches, several combinations will be possible that will enable participants to form one or two squares but only one combination is possible that will form five squares six-by-six inches. After drawing the lines on the six-by-six inch squares and labeling them with lower case letters, cut each square as marked into smaller pieces to make the part of the puzzle. Mark the five envelopes A, B, C, D, and E. Distribute the cardboard pieces in the five envelopes as follows: Envelope A has pieces h, e, i; Envelope B has pieces a, a, a, c; Envelope C has pieces a, j; Envelope D has pieces d, f; and Envelope E has pieces g, b, f, c. Erase the penciled letter from each piece and write, instead, the appropriate envelope letter so that a group can easily redistribute the pieces in their respective envelopes when the task has been completed.

Directions for initiating Broken Squares: Students sit in a circle, five persons per group. Distribute the five envelopes, one to each student. Tell students that their task is to make five squares in their group; one square should be in front of each student at the end. Students should not speak or motion to each other. They may not take pieces from another student; they may only give them to one another. After all groups have reconstructed their five squares silently and cooperatively, they discuss in the foreign language the problems and feelings that they experienced while participating in this non-verbal communication activity.

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WHOLE CLASS ACTIVITIES

RUMOR (B, I, A)

Purpose: To practice listening comprehension skills, and to speak accurately in a foreign language.

The students sit in a circle. One student thinks of a sentence in the foreign language which he or she whispers once to the person on the left. The second student in the circle whispers the same sentence to the student on the left. When all students have heard and whispered the sentence to his or her neighbor on the left, the last student to hear it says it aloud.

PICTURE MATCHING (B,I)

Purpose: To develop listening comprehension skills using pictures or drawings.

Distribute the pictures to the class. Students listen to a sentence in the foreign language, look at the picture, then circle the correct letter according to the message.

MAPS (B, I)

Purpose: To practice understanding directions in a foreign language.

Each student receives a map of a town or city. The students pretend that they are at a certain location on the map. Give the students oral directions to walk or drive to a particular location on the map. The students respond by drawing a line along their map. Then ask them: "Where are you?"

WRITTEN ANSWERS (B, I)

Purpose: To develop listening comprehension skills with the aid of written responses.

Distribute handouts with written answers. Read aloud and explain the alternatives for each item. Read aloud each statement item once and each question about the statement twice.

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AUDIO MOTOR UNIT (B, I, A)

Purpose: To practice listening comprehension skills using an audio-motor approach.

The teacher plays a tape of a series of commands in the foreign language based on a specific topic (e.g., ordering a meal in a restaurant). First, the teacher physically responds to each command to demonstrate what it means. Second, the tape is played again and the students carry out the commands with any necessary prompting from the teacher. Finally, the teacher gives the commands in a different order to test whether or not the students have really mastered the sentences' meaning.

Variation: Teach prepositions of position and location as well as important adverbs of direction using the audio motor technique. When most of the students seem to understand all the commands, they can take turns giving them to the class.

DRAWINGS (I, A)

Purpose: To practice listening comprehension skills with the aid of a drawing.

The teacher describes the shape and size of specific figures or objects and tells the students where to place them. The students respond by drawing the figure or object in the manner and location described by the teacher or a very proficienct student of the foreign language.

Note: Explain any necessary vocabulary words before using this activity.

RADIO WAVES (I, A)

Purpose: To practice listening comprehension skills with the aid of a radio.

For intermediate students: Tape record a 30-second radio broadcast made in the foreign language (weather reports and commercial advertisements work well). Transcribe the broadcast, substituting a line for each tenth content word spoken (content words are nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs). Distribute copies of the transcription to students. The students' task is to write in the omitted words on the transcription as they listen to the radio broadcast.

For advanced students: Use the same technique described above, with one or both of the following adaptations: (1) Tape longer than 30-second broadcasts (e.g., newscasts, talk programs). (2) Substitute short phrases of 4-5 words at varying intervals such as the beginning, middle or end of sentences.

POEMS (I, A)

Purpose: To provide speaking practice for each student and listening comprehension practice for the entire class.

Each student selects a favorite poem in the foreign language, then memorizes it. The student recites the poem, explains its meaning to the class, then recites it again (the other students can repeat it line-by-line).

REPORTS (I, A)

Purpose: To report on current news events and people.

Each student brings to class an interesting newspaper or magazine clipping in his or her native or foreign language. The student summarizes the article's content in the foreign language.

Follow-up Activity: The student can discuss the ideas in the article with the class.

PERSONALIZED PRESENTATIONS (I, A)

Purpose: To share a personal skill or talent with the class.

One student shares a personal skill or talent with the class. The students participate in the activity in different ways such as listening, asking questions, and singing--depending on the activity.

Variation: Students bring slides, post cards, home travel movies, games, unusual toys, objects of art, etc, and relate their personal experiences attached to these items.

PASSWORD (E, I)

Purpose: To review vocabulary items by means of word association.

Divide the class into two equally numbered teams (if there is an "extra" person, he or she can keep score at the chalkboard; otherwise the teacher can do so). One member of each team tries to help a team partner to guess aloud a series of vocabulary words by providing one-word clues written on cards distributed by the teacher. The team that has the highest number of correctly guessed words wins the game.

Suggestion: The student who is trying to guess the words should sit facing the class and his or her partner. This seating arrangement allows the teacher to show each word to the class by using an overhead projector and screen, thereby adding to students' motivation.

WHAT'S MY LINE? (B, I)

Purpose: To review the names for different professions in a personalized way.

Teach students the names of various professions. Then, one student pretends that he or she is employed in a particular profession. The class tries to guess the name of the profession by listening to the student's oral clues.

PERSONS, PLACES, EVENTS (B, I, A)

Purpose: To practice speaking and listening comprehension skills based on persons, places, and events related to a specific topic.

Choose a specific topic of discussion that interests students. Make three sets of cards that correspond to particular persons, places, and events that relate to the chosen topic. Place the sets, in their separate categories, along the chalkboard sill. Divide the class into two even-numbered teams: Team A and Team B. (With odd-numbered classes, the "extra" person can serve as the scorer.) Tell both teams the discussion topic. Then ask the first student on Team A to choose a person, place, or event category. This student guesses in the foreign language an item of information on a card in one of the three categories. If the student guesses correctly, he or she may guess again in the same or a different category. If the guess is incorrect, a student on Team B goes. Organize the activity so that every student on both teams has an opportunity to participate in it. If desired, teams may complete for points according to a preestablished point scale.

WORD/PHRASE SLIPS (I)

Purpose: To review vocabulary items by using word definitions.

The teacher gives each student a slip of paper with a vocabulary word or idiomatic expression on it that the students studied recently. Students should not show their slips of paper to one another. Students take turns, giving the class verbal hints that describe their word or phrase.

SURVEY (B, I)

Purpose: To obtain information about specific topics of student interest.

Each student writes down the name of every member of the class including his or her own name. The teacher gives each student a survey question. Students ask their survey question and write their anwsers alongside their fellow student's name. The results can be tallied on the chalkboard or overhead transparency.

CHARADES (I, A)

Purpose: To review vocabulary items through pantomine.

1. The class divides into two teams of even-numbered students, if possible. (if not, the "odd" student can serve as scorer.)
2. Each student on both teams writes one vocabulary word or idiomatic expression on a piece of paper. Then they fold the paper and put it into their team's container (e.g., a paper bag or small box).
3. The two teams exchange containers and flip a coin to decide which team will begin the charades.
4. A student from the team that goes first takes a folded paper from the container without looking at it or showing it to his or her team members. Then he or she acts out the meaning of the word or expression nonverbally. (If a student does not understand the word or expression, the teacher can whisper its meaning to him or her.)
5. This student's team members must guess the word or expression by asking questions about it. The students mime answers by using only their hands, arms, feet, and facial expressions.
6. The teacher or an "extra" student in an odd-numbered class keeps a record of how long it takes for a student's team members to guess the word of a phrase correctly.
7. When a student's word or expression is guessed by his or her team, the other team tries to do the same.
8. The team that ends with the shortest total guessing time wins the charades.

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